

Amendments to the Claims:

Please cancel claims 3 and 16-32. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) A *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant having the following characteristics:
 - (a) it is a Gram positive, facultative rod,
 - (b) it ferments ribose, galactose, glucose, fructose, mannose, maltose, lactose, melibiose, sucrose, trehalose, raffinose, L-arabinose and mannitol,
 - (c) it survives at pH 1.5 for up to 4 hours with a loss in growth of no more than log 3,
 - (d) it propagates in the presence of 0.5% bile salts at 3 C resulting in an increase in optical density of 0.5 to 0.8,
 - (e) it is stable when stored in gelatin capsules at 25 C,
 - (f) it adheres to Peyer's Patches at greater than log 5 cfu per mg tissue inhibiting pathogens both by a direct antagonistic effect and by triggering an immune modulation; or a component thereof.
2. (Original) A *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1, wherein said variant is VRI 003 (accession no. NM02/31074).
3. (Canceled)
4. (Original) A composition comprising a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claims 1 or 2, or a component of a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1 or 3 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.
5. (Original) A composition according to claim 4, further comprising a prebiotic, a non-digestible dietary component, dietary fibre or a pharmaceutically active compound.

6. (Original) A composition according to claim 5, wherein the prebiotic is inulin, a resistant starch, an oligosaccharide, a gum or a beta-glucan.
7. (Original) A composition according to claim 6, wherein said prebiotic is unmodified high amylose starch or beta-glucan.
8. (Original) A composition according to any one of claims 4 to 7, wherein said composition comprises live cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
9. (Original) A composition according to any one of claims 4 to 7, wherein said composition comprises dead cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
10. (Original) A composition according to any one of claims 4 to 9, in the form of a tablet, capsule, powder, paste, gel, liquid formulation, dietary supplement or food product.
11. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a tablet.
12. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a food product.
13. (Original) A composition according to claim 12, wherein said food product is a dairy or dairy-based food product.
14. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a liquid formulation.
15. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a dietary supplement.
- 16-32. (Canceled)